

A Lover's Complaint

From off a hill whose concave womb reworded 1
 A plaintful story from a sistering vale, 2
 My spirits t' attend this double voice accorded, 3
 And down I laid to list the sad-tuned tale; 4
 Ere long espied a fickle maid full pale, 5
 Tearing of papers, breaking rings a-twain, 6
 Storming her world with sorrow's wind and rain.

Upon her head a platted hive of straw, 8
 Which fortified her visage from the sun, 9
 Whereon the thought might think sometimes it saw 10
 The carcass of a beauty spent and done. 11
 Time had not scythèd all that youth begun,
 Nor youth all quit, but spite of heaven's fell rage 13
 Some beauty peeped through lattice of seared age. 14

Oft did she heave her napkin to her eyne, 15
 Which on it had conceited characters, 16
 Laund'ring the silken figures in the brine
 That seasoned woe had pelleted in tears, 18
 And often reading what contents it bears;
 As often shrieking undistinguished woe, 20
 In clamors of all size, both high and low.

1 concave womb hollow-shaped hillside. **reworded** echoed **2 plaintful story** i.e., mournful sound (which turns out to be the grieving of a maiden). **sistering** neighboring **3 attend** listen to. **double** (because echoed). **accorded** inclined, consented **4 list** listen to. **sad-tuned** i.e., sung in a minor key **5 fickle** i.e., perturbed, moody **6 papers** i.e., love letters **8 platted hive** i.e., woven hat **9 fortified** protected **10 the thought** the mind; that which thinks **11 carcass** decaying lifeless remnant. **spent** consumed **13 all quit** deserted every part. **fell** deadly, cruel **14 seared** dried up **15 heave** lift. **napkin** handkerchief. **eyne** eyes **16 conceited characters** fanciful or emblematic devices **18 seasoned** (1) matured (2) salted. **pelleted** formed into small globules **20 undistinguished woe** incoherent cries of grief

Sometimes her leveled eyes their carriage ride, 22
 As they did battery to the spheres intend; 23
 Sometimes, diverted, their poor balls are tied 24
 To th' orbèd earth; sometimes they do extend 25
 Their view right on; anon their gazes lend 26
 To every place at once, and, nowhere fixed, 27
 The mind and sight distractedly commixed. 28

Her hair, nor loose nor tied in formal plat, 29
 Proclaimed in her a careless hand of pride; 30
 For some, untucked, descended her sheaved hat, 31
 Hanging her pale and pinèd cheek beside; 32
 Some in her threaden fillet still did bide, 33
 And, true to bondage, would not break from thence,
 Though slackly braided in loose negligence.

A thousand favors from a maund she drew 36
 Of amber, crystal, and of beaded jet, 37
 Which one by one she in a river threw,
 Upon whose weeping margent she was set, 39
 Like usury applying wet to wet, 40
 Or monarch's hands that lets not bounty fall
 Where want cries some, but where excess begs all. 42

22 her . . . ride i.e., her eyes, directed and aimed like a cannon, swiveled about as on a gun carriage 23 As . . . intend as if they did intend to direct their fire against the heavens 24 balls eyeballs 24-25 are . . . earth seem fixed to the orb-shaped earth, to the ground 26 right on straight in front of her 26-27 lend . . . once i.e., roll distractedly everywhere 28 The mind . . . commixed her mind and sight wildly confused or mingled 29 nor . . . nor neither . . . nor. in formal plat neatly braided 30 careless . . . pride hand careless of appearances 31 descended hung from. sheaved straw 32 Hanging . . . beside hanging beside her pale cheek wasted with pining 33 threaden fillet i.e., ribbon binding her hair 36 favors love tokens. maund woven basket with handles 37 beaded jet jet beads 39 weeping margent moist bank (though weeping also applies to her) 40 usury i.e., adding money to money; she adds tears to the river's water 42 Where . . . all i.e., (not) where the needy cry out for some charity, but where the rich beg all the bounty there is

Of folded schedules had she many a one, 43
 Which she perused, sighed, tore, and gave the flood; 44
 Cracked many a ring of posied gold and bone, 45
 Bidding them find their sepulchers in mud;
 Found yet more letters sadly penned in blood,
 With sleided silk feat and affectedly 48
 Enswathed and sealed to curious secrecy. 49

These often bathed she in her fluxive eyes, 50
 And often kissed, and often 'gan to tear;
 Cried, "O false blood, thou register of lies, 52
 What unapproved witness dost thou bear! 53
 Ink would have seemed more black and damnèd here!"
 This said, in top of rage the lines she rents, 55
 Big discontent so breaking their contents. 56

A reverend man that grazed his cattle nigh— 57
 Sometime a blusterer, that the ruffle knew 58
 Of court, of city, and had let go by
 The swiftest hours, observèd as they flew— 60
 Towards this afflicted fancy fastly drew, 61
 And, privileged by age, desires to know
 In brief the grounds and motives of her woe.

43 *schedules* papers containing writing, i.e., letters 44 *gave the flood* threw in the stream 45 *posied* inscribed with a motto 48 *sleided* separated into threads. *feat* feately, adroitly. *affectedly* lovingly
 49 *Enswathed* . . . *secrecy* wrapped about (with the silk) and sealed (with wax) into careful secrecy 50 *fluxive* flowing 52 *blood* i.e., the blood in which the letters were written (l. 47), but with a sense also of the *blood* or passion that has played her *false*. *register* record
 53 *unapproved* unconfirmed, false 55 *in top of* in the height of. *rents* rends, tears 56 *discontent* . . . *contents* (with a play of antithesis)
 57 *reverend* aged 58 *Sometime* at one time. *blusterer* boisterous fellow. *ruffle* commotion, bustle 60 *swiftest hours* i.e., time of youth. *observèd as they flew* (This man has let his youth go by and disappear, but not without observing and learning from the years as they flew.) 61 *fancy* i.e., amorous passion, and the person expressing it. *fastly* (1) quickly (2) in close proximity

So slides he down upon his grained bat, 64
 And comely-distant sits he by her side, 65
 When he again desires her, being sat, 66
 Her grievance with his hearing to divide. 67
 If that from him there may be aught applied 68
 Which may her suffering ecstasy assuage, 69
 'Tis promised in the charity of age.

"Father," she says, "though in me you behold 71
 The injury of many a blasting hour, 72
 Let it not tell your judgment I am old;
 Not age, but sorrow, over me hath power.
 I might as yet have been a spreading flower, 75
 Fresh to myself, if I had self-applied 76
 Love to myself and to no love beside.

"But, woe is me! Too early I attended 78
 A youthful suit—it was to gain my grace— 79
 O, one by nature's outwards so commended 80
 That maidens' eyes stuck over all his face. 81
 Love lacked a dwelling and made him her place; 82
 And when in his fair parts she did abide,
 She was new lodged and newly deified.

"His browny locks did hang in crooked curls,
 And every light occasion of the wind 86
 Upon his lips their silken parcels hurls. 87
 What's sweet to do, to do will aptly find; 88
 Each eye that saw him did enchant the mind,
 For on his visage was in little drawn 90
 What largeness thinks in Paradise was sawn. 91

64 So . . . bat and so he lowers himself by means of his club or staff that is worn and showing the grain **65** comely-distant at a decorous distance **66** being he being **67** divide share **68** If that if **69** ecstasy frenzy (of grief) **71** Father i.e., old man **72** blasting blighting, withering **75** spreading unfolding **76** Fresh to myself i.e., like a flower that lives and dies unseen and unplucked **78** attended heeded **79** grace favor **80** nature's outwards the physical appearance given him by nature **81** stuck over i.e., were glued to **82** Love Venus **86** occasion i.e., stirring **87** Upon . . . hurls (the wind) tosses the *silken parcels*, the curls, against his lips **88** to do will aptly find i.e., will find a doer or an occasion **90** in little in miniature **91** What . . . sawn what one supposes was seen in full scale in Paradise

"Small show of man was yet upon his chin;	
His phoenix down began but to appear	93
Like unshorn velvet on that termless skin	94
Whose bare outbragged the web it seemed to wear.	95
Yet showed his visage by that cost more dear;	96
And nice affections wavering stood in doubt	97
If best were as it was, or best without.	98
"His qualities were beauteous as his form,	99
For maiden-tongued he was, and thereof free;	100
Yet, if men moved him, was he such a storm	101
As oft twixt May and April is to see,	102
When winds breathe sweet, unruly though they be.	
His rudeness so with his authorized youth	104
Did livery falseness in a pride of truth.	105
"Well could he ride, and often men would say,	
'That horse his mettle from his rider takes.	107
Proud of subjection, noble by the sway,	108
What rounds, what bounds, what course, what stop he	
makes!'	109
And controversy hence a question takes,	110
Whether the horse by him became his deed,	111
Or he his manage by th' well-doing steed.	112

93 phoenix i.e., suggesting his unique perfection (since only one phoenix, a mythical bird, exists at one time) **94 termless** indescribable; youthful **95 bare outbragged** bareness surpassed. **web** i.e., covering, the downy beard **96 cost** (1) expense (2) rich covering; i.e., his face seemed lovelier because of its rich or silken covering. **dear** (1) costly (2) lovely **97 nice affections** carefully discriminating tastes, inclinations **98 without** i.e., lacking the downy beard **99 qualities were** manner was as **100 maiden-tongued** modest of speech, soft-spoken. **free** eloquent; innocent **101 moved** i.e., to anger **102 to see** to be seen **104-105 His . . . truth** his roughness, privileged by his youth, thereby did dress falseness in a magnificent garment or concealment of truth **107 mettle** vigor and strength of spirit **108 noble by the sway** made noble by the way he's controlled **109 stop** sudden check in a horse's "career" or trial gallop at full speed. (All the terms here are terms of *manage*, l. 112, the schooling or handling of a horse.) **110 takes** takes up, considers **111-112 Whether . . . steed** whether it was owing to his horsemanship that his horse acted so becomingly or whether he seemed such a good rider because he had so good a horse

"But quickly on this side the verdict went:
 His real habitude gave life and grace 114
 To appertainings and to ornament,
 Accomplished in himself, not in his case. 116
 All aids, themselves made fairer by their place, 117
 Came for additions, yet their purposed trim 118
 Pieced not his grace, but were all graced by him. 119

"So on the tip of his subduing tongue
 All kind of arguments and question deep, 122
 All replication prompt and reason strong, 123
 For his advantage still did wake and sleep.
 To make the weeper laugh, the laughter weep, 125
 He had the dialect and different skill, 126
 Catching all passions in his craft of will,

"That he did in the general bosom reign 127
 Of young, of old, and sexes both enchanted,
 To dwell with him in thoughts, or to remain
 In personal duty, following where he haunted. 130
 Consents bewitched, ere he desire, have granted, 131
 And dialogued for him what he would say, 132
 Asked their own wills, and made their wills obey. 133

114 habitude constitution, temperament **116 case** conditions and circumstances, e.g., the possession of so good a horse **117 place** i.e., place near to him or on his person **118 Came for additions** came in for consideration as additional graces. **purposed trim** intended function as adornment **119 Pieced** mended, augmented **122 replication** reply. **reason strong** persuasive argument **123 still** continually. **wake and sleep** i.e., work in varying moods, now actively, now insinuatingly **125 dialect** manner of expression. **different** varied, readily adaptable **126 passions** (1) passions of his hearers (2) passions incorporated into his moving speech. **craft of will** skill in persuasion **127 That** so that. **general bosom** hearts of all **130 In personal duty** i.e., like a personal servant. **haunted** frequented **131-133 Consents . . . obey** i.e., women have consented to his will before he even asked them, and have made up his love speeches to them for him, and have made themselves obey their own desires

"Many there were that did his picture get
 To serve their eyes, and in it put their mind, 135
 Like fools that in th' imagination set
 The goodly objects which abroad they find 137
 Of lands and mansions, theirs in thought assigned, 138
 And laboring in more pleasures to bestow them 139
 Than the true gouty landlord which doth owe them; 140

"So many have, that never touched his hand, 141
 Sweetly supposed them mistress of his heart. 142
 My woeful self, that did in freedom stand,
 And was my own fee simple, not in part, 144
 What with his art in youth, and youth in art,
 Threw my affections in his charmed power, 146
 Reserved the stalk and gave him all my flower.

"Yet did I not, as some my equals did, 148
 Demand of him, nor being desired yielded; 149
 Finding myself in honor so forbid, 150
 With safest distance I mine honor shielded. 151
 Experience for me many bulwarks builded 152
 Of proofs new-bleeding, which remained the foil 153
 Of this false jewel, and his amorous spoil. 154

135 in it . . . mind let their minds become engrossed with it
 137 objects i.e., of sight. abroad round about them, in the world
 138 theirs . . . assigned imagining those possessions to be their own
 139 laboring . . . them striving to derive more pleasure from them
 140 owe own 141 So many thus many persons, many women
 142 them themselves 144 was . . . part i.e., had total control of my own
 destiny, not partial control, as of land held in freehold 146 charmed
 power power to charm or cast a spell 148 my equals i.e., of those
 equal to me in age and station 149 Demand . . . yielded i.e., ask him to
 take me, or yield myself to him the moment he desired me to 150 in
 honor so forbid forbidden by (maidenly) honor to do so (i.e., to yield
 at once) 151 With safest distance by staying at a safe distance
 152-153 Experience . . . new-bleeding i.e., the experience of those
 recently undone in love by him provided me with many defenses
 153 foil dark background used to show off the brilliance of a jewel
 154 this false jewel i.e., the young man. spoil plunder; that which is
 spoiled

"But, ah, who ever shunned by precedent
 The destined ill she must herself assay? 156
 Or forced examples, 'gainst her own content, 157
 To put the by-past perils in her way? 158
 Counsel may stop awhile what will not stay; 159
 For when we rage, advice is often seen 160
 By blunting us to make our wits more keen. 161

"Nor gives it satisfaction to our blood 162
 That we must curb it upon others' proof, 163
 To be forbade the sweets that seems so good 164
 For fear of harms that preach in our behoof. 165
 O appetite, from judgment stand aloof! 166
 The one a palate hath that needs will taste, 167
 Though Reason weep and cry, 'It is thy last.'

"For further I could say 'This man's untrue,' 169
 And knew the patterns of his foul beguiling; 170
 Heard where his plants in others' orchards grew, 171
 Saw how deceits were gilded in his smiling; 172
 Knew vows were ever brokers to defiling; 173
 Thought characters and words merely but art, 174
 And bastards of his foul adulterate heart.

156 **assay** learn by experience 157 **forced** proffered, urged. **content** i.e., presumed happiness in love 158 **To . . . way** to raise as objections (to her own love happiness) the past perils (of others) 159 **stay** remain stopped forever 160 **rage** i.e., in passion 161 **By . . . keen** i.e., in attempting to stop us, merely making us all the more ingenious and eager 162 **blood** passion 163 **proof** experience 164 **seems** i.e., seem 165 **preach in our behoof** i.e., offer us good advice aimed at benefiting us 166 **O appetite . . . aloof** i.e., beware lest passion overwhelm reason by its immediacy 167 **The one** i.e., passion, *appetite*. **needs will taste** insists upon gratification 169 **say . . . untrue** tell of this man's faithlessness 170 **knew . . . beguiling** i.e., had examples of his treachery before me 171 **plants** i.e., children illegitimately begotten. **orchards** gardens 172 **gilded** given a gilded (false) surface 173 **brokers** panders 174 **characters and words** i.e., the written and spoken word. **art** artifice

- "And long upon these terms I held my city, 176
 Till thus he 'gan besiege me: 'Gentle maid,
 Have of my suffering youth some feeling pity,
 And be not of my holy vows afraid.
 That's to ye sworn to none was ever said; 180
 For feasts of love I have been called unto, 181
 Till now did ne'er invite, nor never woo. 182
- " 'All my offenses that abroad you see 183
 Are errors of the blood, none of the mind.
 Love made them not. With acture they may be, 185
 Where neither party is nor true nor kind. 186
 They sought their shame that so their shame did find;
 And so much less of shame in me remains 188
 By how much of me their reproach contains. 189
- " 'Among the many that mine eyes have seen,
 Not one whose flame my heart so much as warmed, 191
 Or my affection put to th' smallest teen, 192
 Or any of my leisures ever charmed. 193
 Harm have I done to them, but ne'er was harmed;
 Kept hearts in liveries, but mine own was free, 195
 And reigned, commanding in his monarchy.

176 city citadel (of chastity) **180 That's** that which is **181-182 For . . .**
woo I have been invited to other feasts of love before now, but never
 until now did I do the inviting and the wooing **183 abroad** in the world
 around us **185-186 With . . . kind** they may be physically performed
 where neither partner is faithful or truly in love **188-189 And . . .**
contains i.e., and I am all the less to blame by how little their re-
 proaches really accuse me (rather than themselves) **191 Not one . . .**
warmed i.e., there is not one whose flame of passion so much as
 warmed my heart **192 Or . . . teen** or gave my affection the least
 sorrow (*teen*) **193 Or . . . charmed** or put a spell on any of my times of
 leisure **195 in liveries** in the uniform of a person in service, i.e., almost
 enslaved

"Look here what tributes wounded fancies sent me, 197
 Of pallid pearls and rubies red as blood,
 Figuring that they their passions likewise lent me 199
 Of grief and blushes, aptly understood
 In bloodless white and the encrimsoned mood— 201
 Effects of terror and dear modesty, 202
 Encamped in hearts but fighting outwardly. 203

"And, lo, behold these talents of their hair, 204
 With twisted metal amorously impleached, 205
 I have received from many a several fair, 206
 Their kind acceptance weepingly beseeched, 207
 With th' annexions of fair gems enriched, 208
 And deep-brained sonnets that did amplify 209
 Each stone's dear nature, worth, and quality.

"The diamond? Why, 'twas beautiful and hard,
 Whereto his invised properties did tend; 212
 The deep-green emerald, in whose fresh regard 213
 Weak sights their sickly radiance do amend; 214
 The heaven-hued sapphire and the opal blend 215
 With objects manifold—each several stone, 216
 With wit well blazoned, smiled or made some moan. 217

197 wounded fancies i.e., doting young women 199 Figuring symbolizing
 201 mood mode, form, emotional state (i.e., blushing) 202 Effects
 the signs or results. dear precious; deeply felt 203 but fighting
 outwardly and only feigning resistance 204 talents i.e., treasures,
 riches. (Literally, coins or valuable metal plates.) 205 impleached
 intertwined 206 a several fair different beautiful ladies 207 Their
 kind . . . beseeched who have besought me with their tears to accept
 their gifts kindly 208 annexions additions 209 deep-brained intri-
 cate. amplify enlarge upon, go into detail about 212 Whereto . . .
 tend toward which its invisible properties incline. (*Invised*, used no-
 where else, is of uncertain meaning.) The young man too is beautiful
 and hard. 213 regard aspect, sight 214 radiance power of vision. (The
 emerald helps repair weak vision to those who look at it, just as the
 young man refreshes the eyes by his beauty.) 215-216 blend . . . mani-
 fold blended with many colors (?) or, blended with (or that blends with)
 many objects presented to the sight (?) 217 blazoned proclaimed,
 cataloged (in the accompanying sonnets)

" 'Lo, all these trophies of affections hot, 218
 Of pensived and subdued desires the tender, 219
 Nature hath charged me that I hoard them not,
 But yield them up where I myself must render,
 That is, to you, my origin and end; 222
 For these, of force, must your oblations be, 223
 Since, I their altar, you enpatron me. 224

" 'O, then, advance of yours that phraseless hand, 225
 Whose white weighs down the airy scale of praise! 226
 Take all these similes to your own command, 227
 Hallowed with sighs that burning lungs did raise; 228
 What me, your minister, for you obeys, 229
 Works under you; and to your audit comes 230
 Their distract parcels in combinèd sums. 231

" 'Lo, this device was sent me from a nun, 233
 Or sister sanctified, of holiest note, 234
 Which late her noble suit in court did shun, 235
 Whose rarest havings made the blossoms dote; 236
 For she was sought by spirits of richest coat, 237
 But kept cold distance, and did thence remove 238
 To spend her living in eternal love.

218 affections passions **219 pensived** saddened. **tender** offering
222 ender end, conclusion. (You are the source of my life and that
 without which I cannot live.) **223 of force** perforce. **your oblations**
 offerings made at the altar of love for you **224 Since . . . me** since I am
 the altar (on which these gifts are offered), and you are my patron saint
 (to whom the altar is dedicated) **225 phraseless** which no words can
 describe **226 weighs . . . praise** i.e., outweighs in the scales any praise
 that can be offered to it in airy words **227 similes** i.e., symbolic
 love tokens or gems accompanied by symbolic explanation in the
 sonnets **228 Hallowed** consecrated. **burning** i.e., hot with passion
229-230 What . . . you i.e., whatever obeys me and is at my command
 as your minister or agent acting on your authority is thus yours also
230 audit accounting **231 distract** separate **233 note** reputation
234 Which . . . shun i.e., who recently shunned the attendance at court
 to which her noble rank entitled her. **suit in** attendance at **235 Whose**
. . . dote i.e., whose rare gift of beauty made the young courtiers (in the
 blossom of their life) dote on her **236 spirits** spirited young men.
coat coat of arms, i.e., descent **237 remove** depart **238 living**
 lifetime. **eternal love** love of the eternal God (i.e., she became a nun)

" 'But, O my sweet, what labor is 't to leave 239
 The thing we have not, mast'ring what not strives, 240
 Paling the place which did no form receive, 241
 Playing patient sports in unconstrained gyves? 242
 She that her fame so to herself contrives, 243
 The scars of battle scapeth by the flight
 And makes her absence valiant, not her might. 245

" 'O, pardon me, in that my boast is true! 246
 The accident which brought me to her eye
 Upon the moment did her force subdue, 248
 And now she would the caged cloister fly. 249
 Religious love put out religion's eye. 250
 Not to be tempted, would she be immured, 251
 And now to tempt all liberty procured. 252

" 'How mighty then you are, O, hear me tell!
 The broken bosoms that to me belong 254
 Have emptied all their fountains in my well, 255
 And mine I pour your ocean all among.
 I strong o'er them, and you o'er me being strong, 257
 Must for your victory us all congest, 258
 As compound love to physic your cold breast. 259

239-242 what . . . **gyves** i.e., how can it be called a difficult thing to give up something we haven't tried yet, mastering an emotion that offers no resistance, *paling*, or fencing, in the heart upon which no lover has yet made any impression, patiently pretending to endure restraints that in fact impose no restraint and that one is not obliged to endure
243 fame . . . **contrives** devises for herself a reputation (for renouncing love) **245** makes . . . **might** i.e., shows valor only in avoiding temptation, not in confronting it directly **246** my boast i.e., that she could resist me only by fleeing, not when she saw me **248** Upon the moment at once **249** would . . . fly wished to flee the locked convent
250 Religious . . . eye i.e., love of me put out love of the divine
251-252 Not . . . **procured** before, she wished to be shut up from temptation, but now she sought liberty to venture everything. (The quarto reads *enur'd* for *immured*, and perhaps should be *inured*, habituated.) **254** bosoms i.e., hearts **255** well spring, stream **257** strong victorious **258** for because of. us all i.e., my admirers and myself. **congest** gather together **259** compound love i.e., love compounded of the various loves of myself and my former loves. (*Compound* also has the suggestion of a drug.) **physic** cure

"My parts had power to charm a sacred nun, 260
 Who, disciplined, ay, dieted in grace, 261
 Believed her eyes when they t' assail begun, 262
 All vows and consecrations giving place.
 O most potential love! Vow, bond, nor space, 264
 In thee hath neither sting, knot, nor confine, 265
 For thou art all, and all things else are thine.

"When thou impresses, what are precepts worth 267
 Of stale example? When thou wilt inflame, 268
 How coldly those impediments stand forth
 Of wealth, of filial fear, law, kindred, fame!
 Love's arms are peace, 'gainst rule, 'gainst sense,
 'gainst shame, 271
 And sweetens, in the suffering pangs it bears, 272
 The aloes of all forces, shocks, and fears. 273

"Now all these hearts that do on mine depend,
 Feeling it break, with bleeding groans they pine, 275
 And, suppliant, their sighs to you extend 276
 To leave the battery that you make 'gainst mine, 277
 Lending soft audience to my sweet design,
 And credent soul to that strong-bonded oath 279
 That shall prefer and undertake my troth.' 280

260 parts qualities **261 disciplined** subjected to religious discipline.
dieted nourished, controlled **262 assail** i.e., assail her heart
264 potential powerful **264-265 Vow . . . confine** against you vows have
 no strength (*sting*), bonds have no binding force (*knot*), and space is no
 barrier or impediment (*confine*) **267 thou impresses** you make an
 impression on a heart, or conscript it into your service **267-268 what**
 . . . **example** of what worth are moralistic warnings based on stale old
 instances **271 Love's . . . shame** i.e., love's might enforces its own
 peace in the teeth of reason, good sense, and decorum **272 it bears**
 that it (love) brings, the pangs that lovers must suffer **273 aloes** i.e.,
 bitterness. **forces** acts of force. **shocks** clashes **275 break** i.e., break
 in disappointment at the threat of rejection by the woman now ad-
 dressed. **bleeding groans** (Each groan was thought to cost the heart a
 drop of blood.) **276 suppliant** as supplicants **277 leave** leave off
279 credent believing, trusting **280 prefer** advance. **undertake** guar-
 antee, see through to the end

"This said, his watery eyes he did dismount, 281
 Whose sights till then were leveled on my face; 282
 Each cheek a river running from a fount
 With brinish current downward flowed apace.
 O, how the channel to the stream gave grace! 285
 Who glazed with crystal gate the glowing roses 286
 That flame through water which their hue encloses.

"O father, what a hell of witchcraft lies 288
 In the small orb of one particular tear! 289
 But with the inundation of the eyes
 What rocky heart to water will not wear?
 What breast so cold that is not warmed here?
 O cleft effect! Cold modesty, hot wrath, 293
 Both fire from hence and chill extincture hath. 294

"For, lo, his passion, but an art of craft, 295
 Even there resolved my reason into tears; 296
 There my white stole of chastity I daffed, 297
 Shook off my sober guards and civil fears; 298
 Appear to him as he to me appears, 299
 All melting; though our drops this difference bore: 300
 His poisoned me, and mine did him restore.

281 dismount remove from its mount, lower (as with an artillery piece) **282 leveled on** aimed at **285 channel . . . stream** i.e., cheek to the flow of tears **286 Who** which, i.e., the stream of tears. **gate** i.e., a protective layer **288 father** i.e., the old man to whom she is talking **289 particular** single **293 cleft** twofold. **wrath** passion (the wrath of love) **294 extincture** extinguishing **295 passion** passionate wooing. **but an art** merely an artifice **296 resolved** dissolved **297 daffed** doffed, put off **298 guards** defenses. **civil** decorous, grave **299 Appear** I did appear **300 drops** i.e., tears (which here have medicinal qualities)

"In him a plenitude of subtle matter, 302
 Applied to cautels, all strange forms receives, 303
 Of burning blushes, or of weeping water,
 Or swooning paleness; and he takes and leaves, 305
 In either's aptness, as it best deceives, 306
 To blush at speeches rank, to weep at woes, 307
 Or to turn white and swoon at tragic shows;

"That not a heart which in his level came 309
 Could scape the hail of his all-hurting aim, 310
 Showing fair nature is both kind and tame; 311
 And, veiled in them, did win whom he would maim. 312
 Against the thing he sought he would exclaim;
 When he most burnt in heart-wished luxury, 314
 He preached pure maid and praised cold chastity. 315

"Thus merely with the garment of a grace 316
 The naked and concealèd fiend he covered, 317
 That th' unexperient gave the tempter place, 318
 Which like a cherubin above them hovered. 319
 Who, young and simple, would not be so loved? 320
 Ay me! I fell, and yet do question make 321
 What I should do again for such a sake. 322

302 subtle matter matter capable of being variously impressed or formed **303 cautels** crafty devices **305 takes and leaves** i.e., uses one and avoids the other **306 In either's aptness** whichever is more appropriate **307 rank** gross **309 That** so that. **level** range and aim. (Continues the metaphor of siege.) **310 Could** that could. **hail** i.e., of artillery **311 Showing . . . tame** i.e., his aim being to represent his true nature as loving and docile **312 And . . . maim** and, disguised thus in kindness and docility, or in *blushes*, *weeping*, and *paleness* (ll. 304-305), won the heart of the woman he intended to harm **314 heart-wished luxury** deeply desired lechery **315 pure maid** as if he were an untouched virgin **316 with . . . grace** with a charming outward show or appearance (perhaps suggesting also one of the three Graces) **317 The naked . . . covered** he covered his fiendish inner self with concealment **318 inexperient** inexperienced. **place** entry **319 Which . . . hovered** who, resembling a cherub, hovered over his victims as though offering them protection **320 simple** naive. **be so loved** surrender to a lover like him **321 question make** i.e., ask myself **322 for such a sake** for someone like him, or for the sake of falling into such pleasure—however brief

"O, that infected moisture of his eye,	323
O, that false fire which in his cheek so glowed,	
O, that forced thunder from his heart did fly,	325
O, that sad breath his spongy lungs bestowed,	326
O, all that borrowed motion seeming owed,	327
Would yet again betray the fore-betrayed,	
And new pervert a reconcilèd maid!"	329

323 infected infectious **325 forced** feigned. **from** that from
326 spongy lungs lungs that are spongelike (as all lungs are; perhaps
with the suggestion of "blown up with flattery and pretended grief")
327 borrowed . . . **owed** pretended action that seemed in earnest. **owed**
owned, his own **329 reconcilèd** penitent

Date and Text

A Lover's Complaint first appeared in Thomas Thorpe's 1609 edition of the sonnets. It may have been printed from the same transcript as that used to print the sonnets. The poem is not mentioned on the title page of the volume, but has its own head-title on sig. K^v: "A Louers complaint. By William Shake-speare." For the reliability of this attribution, see the Introduction to *A Lover's Complaint*.

Textual Notes

These textual notes are not a historical collation; they are simply a record of departures in this edition from the copy text. The reading adopted in this edition appears in boldface, followed by the rejected reading from the copy text, i.e., the quarto of 1609. Only major alterations in punctuation are noted. Corrections of minor and obvious typographical errors are not indicated.

Copy text: the Sonnet quarto of 1609 [Q].

7 sorrow's sorrowes, **14** lattice lettice **37** beaded bedded **51** 'gan gaue
95 wear were **103** breathe breath **112** manage mannad'g **118** Came Can
164 forbade forbod **182** woo vovv **198** pallid palyd **204** hair
heir **205** metal mettle **228** Hallowed Hollowed **251** immured enur'd
252 procured procure **260** nun Sunne **293** O Or **303** strange straing